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SUBJECT: LESOTHO TO HOST FEB. 27-29 LDC TRADE MINISTERS MEETING

REF: GENEVA 99

¶1. According to local government and diplomatic sources, the Government of Lesotho, through its Ministry of Trade and Industry, will host a meeting February 27-29 for Ministers of Trade from WTO-member Least Developed Countries (LDC). Lesotho, currently the chair of the WTO LDC Grouping, has obtained funding from Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) to host the event, at which some 30 LDC Ministers and a host of representatives from developed and developing countries and international trade organizations are expected to attend.

¶2. The purpose of the meeting, according to a draft concept paper, is for the LDCs to "regroup, reconnect, bond, and synchronize views" on developments since the suspension of the Doha Round (DDA) trade negotiations in July 2006 and to establish a "clear and unified voice" in advance of a resumption of Doha negotiations and engagement with other WTO trading partners. LDC Trade Ministers last met in Livingston, Zambia in 2005 in preparation for the Hong Kong WTO ministerial conference.

¶3. The draft concept paper also notes that the Maseru meeting will address key LDC trade issues and texts developed since the Doha suspension including agriculture, Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA), services, trade facilitation, the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), rules of origin, and a review of the Livingston Declaration (2005).

¶4. Local sources indicate that some twenty nine nations have confirmed attendance, including: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Maldives, Burma, Nepal, Yemen, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, Samoa, Uganda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Senegal, Guinea, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Haiti, and Madagascar.

¶5. DIFD sources told Emboffs that LDC Trade Ministers, after working out a common position (including adoption of a Maseru declaration) in preparation for a possible global WTO Ministerial Conference in March or April 2008, will meet on the last day of the event (February 29) with invited regional organizations and developed nations, including the United States, the EC, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, China, India, Turkey, Scandinavian countries, WTO, ITC, UNCTAD, AU, IBRD, UNIDO, AfDB, IMF, SACU, SADC, COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Maseru-based diplomats have told us that EC Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and WTO DG Pascal Lamy are likely participants on February 29.

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